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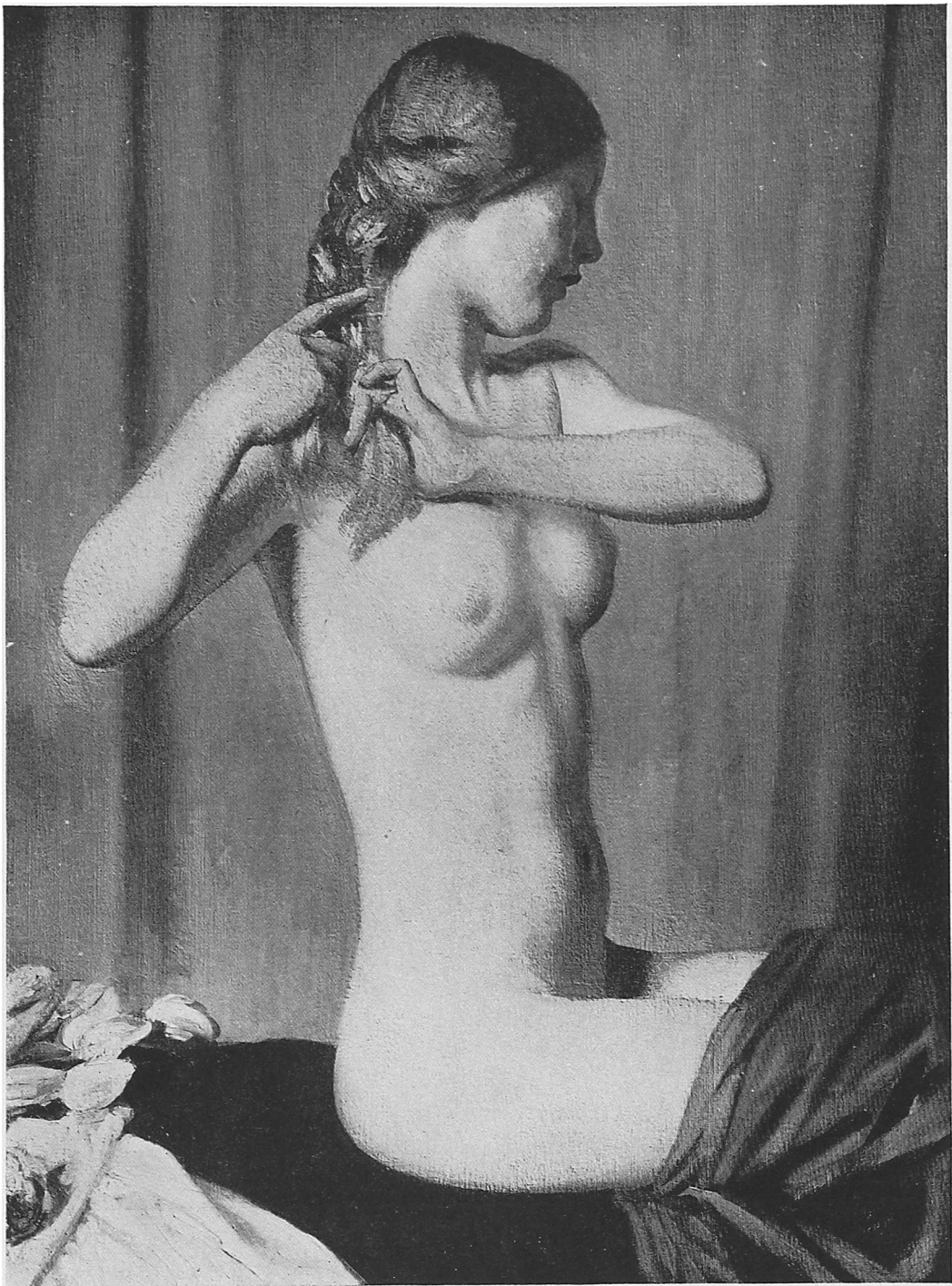


FIGURE STUDY
By George Clausen, R. A.



LANDSCAPE
By George Clausen, R. A.

Current Art Topics

By "MAHLSTICK," London Correspondent

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AUGUST and September are for the artistic world pre-eminently the slack season. The Academy closes its doors on the first Monday of the month of August, and—mixing our metaphors not a little—its cargo of works freighted with so many hopes and ambitions are returned to the agents, the artists and the purchasers, the bulk finally going off to compose the various exhibitions in the capitals of the Provinces, Liverpool, Glasgow, Manchester, etc. Few, if any, of the minor London exhibitions remain open so late. The Painter Brotherhood now betake themselves to their favorite sketching grounds, or seek for new ones. It is something of a mystery how the sculptors fill out their holiday. The painters can fill in the intervals between the sable minstrels on the sands and the concert hall on the pier, with their sketching box, or if they have hied them to more rural haunts, they can combine the rod and the gun with the paint brush or pencil; but there is something incongruous in the picture of a man modeling in clay, plasticine or wax, to the rippling murmur of a trout stream or the strains of the pier band. Perhaps sculptors do not take holidays. Certainly while a very common paragraph in the society column informs us that Mr. David Murray or Mr. N. H. J. Baird, etc., are staying at that fashionable resort, B——, and spend much of their time sketching in the beautiful environs, etc., etc., the comings and goings of the knights of the chisel are quite unchronicled.

The war has, however, greatly restricted sketching area in the United Kingdom—to begin with, the whole of the coast line for three miles inland is barred to paint-box, sketching book and camera; and in addition the environment of all fortifications, camps, munition works, aerodromes, etc., whilst through the country at large the local Bumbles are empowered to cross-examine anyone whom they find making notes of the country-

side, if they see fit to do so.

The toll of the war in the ranks of those who have gone out from the studios to fight daily increases. W. Wyllie, R. A., has lost his son; Stanhope Forbes, R. A., has lost his only son; the well-known etcher, Luke Naylor, has been killed in France; also Mr. P. F. Gethin, belonging to the New English art group. Niels Lund also has lost his life in the service of his country; a large landscape by him is in the Luxembourg. The writer knew him well, a giant in bulk and stature, he was one of the quietest and most retiring of men, and a particular friend of Charles John Collings when he first came to London. Another friend of the writer's—Lance T h a c k e r a y—has been taken; the genial humor of his drawings, in their countless reproductions all over the world, have amused our race for years past. They were just a reflection of his own sunny temperament. This, indeed, is not always the case with our mirth-providing artists and writers. W. W. Jacobs, for an example, over whose tales of the sailor man, and the bargee, this generation has rocked and cried with laughter, socially appears the most dismal Daniel ever come to judgment. In suggestive contrast to all such young lives sheared away by the Reaper, in this surely the mightiest harvest he has ever garnered, is the passing at 97 of Harpignies, the great French landscapist. His long life, like that of his English confrere and fellow centenarian, James Sant, to whom I referred last month, was passed in the peaceful and successful pursuit of his Art. In these days when the world is moving so fast to an unknown goal, such a term of years has included the coming and going of epochs of thought and practice, in every domain of man's activity. When in the forties of the last century Harpignies began to paint, what hint, what faintest suspicion was there of the world as we know it? Steam had come, coal gas had come, photography had come, but

electricity had not begun even to make a door bell ring, and in Art the English pre-Raphaelites were considered such anarchists that the Academic Institutions of the day, and the press, rose almost as one man to reprobate such monstrosity. Yet Harpignies lived to see Picasso, Matisse and Van Gogh; the Futurist and the Vorticist. One almost fancies that as he looked into the future glimpsed mainly by the light of such gibbering will-o-the-wisps, and then back along the way of his own Art, serene and stable as the nature which he so reverently interpreted, and contrasted his ideals with the weird wanton monkeyings of so many of his contemporaries, that he was content to say "Nunc dimitte nos." For undoubtedly those who hoped that the war would clarify and restore to sanity the theory and practice of Art, so far must confess to some disappointment, when they look, for instance, at the pages of a new and successful English Art Journal now before me, and read the following apropos of a commercial venture in the teaching line, by a Mr. Alfred Wolmark, to whom I have had occasion previously to refer. It says: "To Mr. Wolmark's influence Modern Art owes a considerable debt!!" It continues: "Color, as everyone recognizes nowadays, is of immense importance not only in painting, but also in our homes, etc., etc., and it is as a great colorist that Mr. Wolmark is accepted!!" To those who from the inside know the status of Mr. Wolmark and his work among his brother artists, such drivel is, of course, ludicrous; but it has its serious side. This gentleman is, by such assiduous log rolling, gradually, after the fashion of Mr. John and Mr. Sickert, forging his way into public notice and helping in his degree to vitiate the whole modern conception of Art. As a draughtsman he belongs to the contortionists; he may be able to portray the human figure as it is in its present stage of evolution, but he has not, to my knowledge, done so. But it is as a colorist that we are told to consider him, and so his work will serve as well as another peg on which to hang a few considerations as to this "Modern Color." Color sense is, perhaps, the one sense on which the taste or judgment of mankind has been more universally in accord than on any other. East

and West here do meet. The music of many Eastern races is quite unmelodious and meaningless to Western ears; the very intervals are different. What is tempting and agreeable to the palate varies the world over as chalk from cheese; ideals of the beautiful or the becoming in dress and personal decoration have not and never appear to have had one motive or basis in common except to attract attention and outshine your neighbor. But when the vivid splendor of Chinese pottery, or the exquisite refinements of the Japanese color prints were revealed to the West, they struck no strange or jarring chord. They were just a fresh delight to that sense of color which lives in the glowing harmonies of a Titian, the beauty of the rose, or the feathering of the kingfisher. Even the decoration of uncivilized races are felt to be only crude from this simplicity; but we can search Nature and Art in vain for the acrid colors and combinations that are the distinguishing notes of ultra-modernity. It is a fact that there are certain colors evolved by human industry which are intrinsically discords. In childhood most of us can remember the unpleasant sensation evoked by the color of the "blue bag"; "mustard colored" is a description usually applied approbriously, and "Magenta" has come to stand as a synonym of all that is vile. These repulsions are instinctive—probably have a physiological basis—and we will ransack the Art of the past in vain to find such tints and their congeners singly or in combination. But in our day there have arisen cliques and individuals whose pleasure and purpose it is to flout the natural sense of color. For instance, this Mr. Wolmark, in the prints now before me, displays a design of the Cubist type, wherein hot oppressive reds are combined with heavy lurid blues and yellows, to produce an ensemble that weighs down the spirit. A room in such a scheme would, any doctor will agree, seriously depress the nervous system in anyone sensitive to color influences; it is quite unthinkable, for instance, in a hospital ward. But the evil has gone far beyond the heavy-handed harshness of Mr. Wolmark. In any show of "Modernists" we may see canvas after canvas, where all the scarifying brilliancy of the aniline palette has been ex-

hausted, to sear the eyes of the unclimatized spectator. In the press of the day this sort of thing is described as the "joyance of untrammelled color." But my readers may ask how is it that any artist can produce, and any public tolerate it? The answer in full would be too far reaching for the space at my command, but it may be summed up in two facts: a sated generation lacking convictions and greedy for new sensations, and next the physiological fact that the line dividing the sanity and soundness of our healthy sensations from the same perverted and debased is a thinner one than is generally imagined. Those who meddle or monkey with the abnormal, whether in Art or Morals, may find that they have ventured into a morass from which there is no retracing their steps. The writer was asked after several visits to the second Post-Impressionist Exhibition, what would be on him the effect of many such visits? The answer was that he would probably fall a victim. We know how the first natural revulsion against the horror and cruelty of a Spanish bull fight quickly yields to its evil fascination! but I have never seen that fact put forward as a proof that Spanish bull fights are in themselves estimable; and the same thing would happen if the modern world revived the gladiatorial contests of ancient Rome; those who went twice would mostly see the multiplication table through. This vital fascinating subject of color in Art, especially Western Art, its progress from the Primitive down to the subtleties of Japanese harmonies, I hope again to deal with.

The election of Professor C. Holmes to the keepership of the National Gallery is not an encouraging sign to those who are hoping for a return to sounder ideals. To many of us it is desecration to that House of Treasure that it should be in the care of one whose sympathies are professedly with all that is of ill-omen in the theories now current. He has written, I believe, very learnedly and plausibly about the Old Masters, but what his real views are can be more truly gathered from the living men and schools that he associates himself with, and from his own work; and they both include all that is most pregnant with danger for the future of Art. His own work, his so-

called synthetic delineation of Mountain form and structure are the laughing stock of artists outside his own clique. This lucky gentleman must be added to those who, by their facile pens, *write* themselves into public notice by taking some extreme line, and thence into the various comfortable berths as curators, etc., of museums and galleries, or nice endowments as professors, lecturers, etc., whilst the real experts—the artists—have to stand aside amused, amazed and angered.

As one of the most forceful personalities in English Art undoubtedly stands George Clausen, R. A., at the present moment. His career has been a strenuous one in every way, some of its aspects, like his work, almost suggest a contrariety of ideals as if one belied another, yet an obvious sincerity threads them all. He was the arch-rebel in the greatest revolt against its traditions and authority that the Royal Academy had known since the pre-Raphaelite movement, and yet at the present time both as a painter and a man of affairs he is one of its pillars. In expressing himself he has felt varied influences from Bastien-Lepage to Anton Mauve, though always George Clausen; but interwoven as his career is with the development of English Art through more than a generation, I must leave it till a later occasion to do it justice.

Looking at a most beautiful drawing of "The Weavers' Quarters, Canterbury," by Charles John Collings, which has just been sent to America from the Carroll Gallery here, it was irresistibly suggested what an addition it would be to the world's art if that imaginative vision and magic of hand were addressed to the task of giving us the outward beauty and inward spirit of such of the architectural glories of the mediæval world of faith and conviction, as have escaped the cyclonic blast of the war; also if he would essay to reveal in pictured scroll the infinite pathos of the desolation of Rheims, of the agony of Ypres, which is all that they and many more can show for their heritage of beauty and associations of the past, that past so intimately woven with the renaissance of the world of the West. Would that he might see these lines and be moved to forsake for a season this abiding place in the Canadian Rockies.